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ABSTRACT

An expanded program review process that includes qualitative, ethnographic, retrospective, and subjective data is described. At the University of Kansas, qualitative indicators were developed and methods were designed to implement them. Reviews were moved from a process of reacting to quantitative self-studies to a procedure that involved: intensive interviews, solicitation of alumni judgments on the merit and worth of their experiences (as opposed to collecting only limited-response surveys), and solicitation of reviews by external consultants who are disciplinary specialists. Results of the expanded reviews included development of qualitative data collection procedures, increased desire for narratives and case studies that contribute to greater appreciation of departmental and program constraints, understanding of where flexibility might exist and where resources are strained, and the development of a "member check" process. This process verifies the accuracy of reports, checks for reliability, assesses the extent of assent with the findings and interpretations, and assures that all parties to the program review are fully informed of the report that is filed. Problems involved the training of faculty interviewers, commitment to the review, and coordinating with statewide reviews. (Author/SW)

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INDIGENOUS EFFORTS AT INDIVIDUALIZING PROGRAM REVIEW: A CASE STUDY

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For presentation at the "Symposium on Program Review" at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) in San Antonio, Texas, February 20-23, 1986.

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ABSTRACT

The need for comprehensive and strategic planning and reallocation in higher education has led many institutions to adopt internal program review as one instrument to those ends. While program review is widely discssed on campus, neither the process nor the product is well understood by the faculty who are charged with carrying it out. Furthermore, while faculty may be convinced that quality indicators extend well beyond quantitative data, they are at a loss to provide convincing qualitative data in support of their assessments. Consequently, program reviews often fall short of their intentions, to the disappointment and frustration of everyone concerned.

This case study chronicles a program review process which extended the repertory of data collection methods to include qualitative, ethnographic, retrospective and "subjective" data. Efforts were made to identify qualitative indicators and to design methods and procedures for locating and incorporating them. Reviews were moved from a process of reacting to quantitative "self-studies" to a procedure - for utilizing intensive interviews, solicitation of alumni judgments on the merit and worth of their experiences (as opposed to collecting just limited-response surveys), and solicitation of reviews by external consultants who were disciplinary specialists.

Results of the expanded reviews included development of qualitative data collection procedures; greater appreciation of departmental and program constraints' understanding of where flexibility might exist and where resources were strained; and the development of a "member check" process to verify accuracy of reports, to check for reliability, to assess the extent of assent with the findings and interpretations, and to assure that all parties to the program review were fully informed of the report which was filed.

INDIGENOUS EFFORTS AT INDIVIDUALIZING PROGRAM REVIEW: A CASE STUDY

Introtoduction: Bob Barak has just made the point (among others) that institutions tend to have more successful experiences with program reviews when those reviews are "...developed indigenously to meet the needs, traditions, and environment of a particular institution or system" (1986, p. 22). That has been the experience at the University of Kansas, where program reviews are a fairly new phenomenon, and where faculty have not had long periods in which to grow accustomed to what the process means and to how it may best be conducted.

As a result, the development of the process provides an intersting case study in the tailoring of a process to meet the needs of a particular campus at a particular point in time.

As Barak has also noted in his history of the antecedents, in a very short period of time the purpose of the original program review process has shifted from one of "program improvement" toward that of "program decision making, including termination" (1986, p. 15). In part, this is a reflection not of campus interest, but rather of fiscal and programmatic mandate, as resources have grown scarcer, and as the need for comprehensive and strategic planning and reallocation in higher education have grown more pressing.

History of Program Review at the University

A frmal process for conducting program review at the University of Kansas was instituted in the Autumn of 1980, after much discussion within and among faculty governance groups, the

Faculty Senate and the Senate Executive Council, and the Faculty Council.

Historical Changes in the Process

Early Efforts. The first several rounds of program reviews at the University were rooted in three elements: a departmental "self-study", the ETS faculty and student survey, and graduate faculty review. The departmental self-study was similar to, although not as extensive as, a typical accreditation self-study. It was rooted in indicators of criteria related to cost, productivity (including credit-hour production at the graduate and undergraduate levels), need and demand for the program, and reputation ratings, which were generally collected from such sources as the Chronicle of Higher Education's annual rankings. The latter were especially utilized if they demonstrated that the department of unit ranked among the top 100 in the country. Problems with "prestige" rankings of graduate programs particularly were not debated or discussed (Conrad and Blackburn, 1984?).

The ETS faculty and student survey was routinely distributed by the department to all faculty and to some sample of students, all of whom were instructed to return their completed forms to the Graduate School, which in turn forwarded them for process to ETS. Both the department and the graduate program review committee had access to the results of this survey when it was returned to the institution after processing. Early on in the process, the surveys were used extensively as "evidence" of performance or non-performance on the part of the department in various arenas (e.g., graduate student advising). Later on, after

1982, the surveys continued to be used, but came to be considered one of many forms of data available. As a result, the surveys receded in importance for many departmental reviews.

The third element, graduate faculty review, was directed toward maintaining and improving the quality of graduate instruction by reviewing the research productivity records of individual faculty members. Two outcomes were possible from this review of current vitae: the faculty member could be "re-certified" for membership on the Graduate Faculty (and therefore, continue to chair and advise doctoral dissertations), or the faculty member could be recommended for removal from the Graduate Faculty roster (for a period of five years). The philosophy behind such review was tht faculty who themselves were not engaged in active research programs were probably unable to direct the research efforts of graduate students.

Of the institutional elements of program review, this was probably the one most honored more in the breach than in the observance. In the early years and even now, faculty from other departments found it difficult to recommend that other faculty should have their dissertation chairing privileges revoked for some period of time. As a result, the Graduate School (which directs program reviws) has often had to request the information and recommendations as additional items once the review report has been turned in. And equally often, the recommendations have been aimed at wholesale re-certification, despite the apparent inactivity of some faculty members in research. The judgment is often rendered that the committee has no way of judging what

constitutes productivity in a discipline outside that of the committee members, and that time-lines for publication are sufficiently disparate that it is difficult to tell whether or not a faculty member in the reviewed department is active or not.

In part, this problem is solved by the second review cycle, which is conducted at 10-year intervals, and directed by outside consultants (although as yet, no 10-year cycles have come around). It is believed that disciplinary specialists outside the institution may be firmer in their judgments regarding productivity, and can render decisions regarding how often and in what outlets faculty members should be presenting their work.[1]

Efforts after 1982. The author was asked to take the place of a program review chairman whose sabbatical and other duties prevented him from completing the review. After extensive consultations with Graduate School staff members, review of other program review reports completed within the past year, and review of the literature on program review in other institutions and states, it was collaboratively determined that the evaluation and program review effort should be expanded. The proposed expansion was predicated on my own experience with program evaluation, a particular philosophy of what comprised good evaluation data, and the Graduate School need for more comprehensive treatment of program resources, constraints and flexibility.

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[1]A more complete explanation of the 5-year and 10-year review cycles is contained in the " ", 1980, University of Kansas.

My own experience with program evaluation suggested that evaluation and program review efforts were often incomplete and decisionmakers felt frustrated with techical and quantitative data alone. Decisionmakers intuited--quite righhtly--that numerical data failed to paint a complete picture, and that other data might be equally commanding if they were but available. The problem was a two-pronged one: first, the confusion of "criteria" with "indicators" for that criterion (Barak, 1986, p. 19), and second, appropriate methods and procedures for gathering indicator data.

The particular philosophy of program evaluation which guided the efort derived from naturalistic inquiry (Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Guba and Lincoln, 1982), rather than from conventional inquiry, or traditional scientific and technical formats for program evaluations. Several axioms of naturalistic inquiry were most useful for program reviews. These included: 1) the assumption that reality is not singular, but is rather an individually - and group-centered construction, and therefore multiple, intangible, holistic, and indivisible into separate components for the purposes of study; 2) that linear cause-effect relationships are impossible to establish in the social/behavioral world, and that therefore, inquiry and evaluation ought rather to focus on plausible inferences, webs of relationships, pattern theories, and mutual, simultaneous shaping rathern than straight-line, "If-then" statements; and, finally 3) that higher education is a value-laden enterprise, so that the demand for objectivity is a useless call, and that more valuable for decision-making would be the exploration of multiple value and belief systems by disinterested

third parties. This final assumption, besides embedding the program review in value considerations relevant to the institution, had the effect of grounding the review in local history, local tradition, and statewide needs assessment.

The implications of a move to new-paradigm (naturalistic) philosophical assumptions were that such assumptions called for, and could make unique use of, qualitative methods and strategies in the program review design. A small proposal was written which outlined the undergirding philosophy for this particular program review, and which proposed procedures for accomplishing the review utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data.

The graduate school met thhe proposal with interest and a measure of reserved enthusiasm. Their own needs for additional data -- although not certain what kind -- and for a broader treatment of program and departmental quality, demand/need and centrality, as well as a fuller understanding of resources and constraints, were not being met. Much of the data which had comprised the reports between 1980 and 1982 were those which were recoverable (inslightly different form) from the Office of Institutional Research, from accreditation reports, and from other sources on campus. The Graduate School also felt that wider participation in program review was necessary. Typically, reports had focussed on the data provided by only a few faculty members, or in smaller departments, by the chairperson alone. The review proposed in this instance[2] incorporated four new elements not

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[2]The program review undertaken did not in fact involve a department, but rather a "program area": an area-studies program to which faculty

utilized previously: intensive and unstructured interviews of all faculty members affiliated with the program; solicitation of alumni judgments regarding the utility and value of their experiences on campus; solicitation of reviews by external disciplinary specialists; and the development of a comprehensive "member check" process to ascertain accuracy of final data and degree of assent to the review findings and interpretations.

Description of the process. Typically, a chairperson is designated, and faculty members (usually 3-5 in number) are requested to join the effort. These faculty members are chosen from outside the departmental ranks, and typically represent, insofar as possible, both Arts and Sciences nd professional schools perspectives. In this case, four persons and a chair were designated. In addition, the department undergoing program review is asked to designate a "faculty liaison"--a person who knows the department well, and who can obtain and present data which the committee might request. In this case, both a senior faculty member and the program chairman participated as liaisons to the committee. Convening of the committee and its liaisons is the responsibility of the program review chairperson.

Members of the committee and liaisons were given copies of earlier program reviews, asked to study them, and were oriented

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were "lent" from regular departments ro to which faculty affiliated themselves because of their own scholarly and teaching interests. The program area was Soviet and East European Studies, and faculty were affiliated from such disparate areas as political science and theatre, geology and anthropology, and Germanic studies and religion. Twenty-six faculty in all were involved, under the direction of a program chairman who coordinated Federal grants, military projects with local and state military bases, travel, library acquisitions and other department-like functions.

to differences in the process which they would undertake. The four additional processes -- intensive interviewing, solicitation of alumni judgments, solicitation of external reviews and the final validity check -- were explained to them, and they agreed to experiment with the process as devised. The liaisons were given responsibility for providing certain forms of data to each of the committe members for review (including federal proposals, graduate program course listings and descriptions, lists of personnel assigned to the program area and percentages of responsibility, and the like), and committee members took responsibility for interviewing eight or more program area faculty during the course of the study.

The next step was to create interview protocols which would at the same time leave ample room for the constructions of faculty in the program and yet cover major areas of interest in a program review. The committee and liaisons worked several sessions in a nomination process until an outline was develped which covered all aspects of program functioning, resources, administration and future plans which could be conceived. When the protocol was felt to be fairly complete but still open-ended enough, committee members undertook to contact their interviewees, set up interview times, and complete the interviews.

During this same time period, a sample letter to alumni was prepared and distributed for revision and refinement. After several revisions, the letter was sent to alumni who had majored or minored in the program area during the past ten years. They were asked to describe their current positions, to describe how and in what ways their program studies as a value added to their

current positions, and to comment on the unique contributions of any faculty member who proved especially helpful either during their studies, in placement, or later in their careers. Of some twenty letters sent, seven responses were forthcoming. While this was not a high return rate, several were returned as undeliverable because of address changes, and those which were returned proved thoughtful and balanced in their assessments, particularly in the area of what the program contributed to the individual's professional preparation. Return rates might also have been low due to the respondents' being asked to complete the ETS survey form for graduate students.

Also during this period, a letter was drafted to solicit responses from other disciplinary specialists. The letter was not sent, however, in anticipation of the state Board of Regents' review, which was to take place the following year. Since the same information would be solicited at that time, it was determined that while this was a useful form of data to collect, particularly at the 5-year review cycle (when outside consultants would not be brought in), in this instance, it was not collected.

When all faculty members, many graduate students, and program research assistants and secretaries had been interviewed extensively, the committee met without the faculty liaisons to engage in debriefing--the sharing between committee members of themes and data to support interpretations from the analysis of individual interviews. These debriefing sessions (three, in all) were taped, and committee members provided to the chairperson their own interview notes. After reviewing the tapes and interview

notes, the chairperson convened the committee again to determine responsibility for writing up sections of the final report. Each committee member, including the chairman, took one or more thematic area and constructed a draft from his or her own notes and the notes of other committee members.

Final drafts were the responsibility of the committee chairperson, who undertook to smooth out stylistic differences between committee members' writing, to augment each section with additional quotations, numerical data and other evidence, and to provide a smooth flow to the narrative. Interpretations and final recommendations were created from the individual sections or themes, and the first part of the member-check process began.

In the first stage of that process, committee members read and re-read drafts to be certain that editing did not change their original intentions, and that they were satisfied with the interpretations which they and others had made. They also read carefully to determine whether the evidence advanced was the best which could be mounted for a given finding or interpretation, or whether their own notes provided either additional or more compelling evidence which might be substituted. When the committee was satisfied that the document was a fair and balanced as they could make it, it passed for review to the faculty liaisons and to the program area secretary (who had immediate access to budgetary figures and could check dollar amounts, travel funds and personnel appointments).

The program area chairperson in particular read the draft document with a careful eye, and suggestions for editing and

correcting which he advised were accepted by the review committee without any difficulty. Finally, the program area faculty were notified by memo from the chairperson of the committee thaat a copy of the draft -- reviewed by the committee and by their appointed 'liaisons-- would be circulating to them soon, for their review and comments. Each person interviewed (two faculty members were not interviewed, as they were on sabbatical during the Fall semester) was given the right to withdraw any quotation (non-attributed) which he or she made and which was included in the document. This round of member checks drew several memoranda of appreciation for being able to review the draft, and compliments on its balance and thoroughness.

The final draft was prepared and forwarded to the Graduate School in the Spring of 1983. Included in the final program review report was a section on "Methodology", explaining what procedures were utilized to gather what kinds of data for which indicators and which criteria those indicators were thought to address. The decision of Graduate School staff ws to use the final report as a model for future program review efforts, and the report is now sent when new chairpersons ask for examples of such reports.

Outcomes of the Expanded Program Review Process

There were four major outcomes of the expanded program review process, and each of those contributed to the buttressing of prógram review as a useful and productive activity for both faculty and the Graduate School. Those four outcomes were the development of some qualitative data collection procedures; the creation of a greater desire for narratives which contributed to

larger appreciation of program constraints; the development of an understanding of where programs and departments might have flexibility, or where programmatic flexibility might exist; and in the development of a member check process.

Qualitative data collection procedures. The data collection procedures used here were not particularly sophisticated, but they did represent the first attempt to incorporate such data into the program review process, and they represented too the first time interviews of an entire program area's or department's faculty were conducted. The solicitation of alumni "value-added" comments on their programs was a major extension of the usual data-gathering procedures for alumni, and while the response rate was low, those responses we received were articulate and thoughtful commentaries. Some faculty expressed the idea that qualitative data might be overly "subjective", but the committee made the argument in return that strictly quantitative data were also subjective, and that the choice of which numerical data to use, and the format for display were value choices. The main difference between the subjectivity of qualitative and quantitative data was the participation of all stakeholders in determining the appropriate balance for all data. Stakeholders as well as review committee members had a chance to contribute to the array of evidence offered in support of any interpretation or recommendation.

Appreciation of program constraints. Because a narrative form and case study style allow for the presentation of conflict and tension, the dynamics of operating a program area where nearly all time is contributed, and maintaining continuity of program offerings

for graduate study could be demonstrated. Staff of the Graduate School commented that they were able to see and understand problems more clearly with this reporting format than with other more technical and numerical forms. Trade-offs in running such a program (not to mention the inevitable tension in generating outside funding for support services and library acquisitions) were amenable to the subtle counter-argument which narrative style affords. Constraints displayed in this manner were simply better appreciated by those who would ultimately make decisions about program improvement or continuation.

The search for flexibility. A second advantage to the case study approach utilizing qualitative data is that recommendations do not come as a surprise to the reader. When constraints on the program are discussed as dynamic tensions, the recommendation for more resources, or for a reallocation of resouurces to areas of greater need simply "drop out" as part of the larger understandings. When resources are flexible but can only be rearrayed with administrative approval, the rationale for doing so is many times clearer in case study format.

A "member-check" process. One of the most appreciated of the innovations in the process appeared to be the member check procedure, whereby all interviewed faculty and staff were furnished a draft of the final report, and their reactions were solicited. Some faculty took the opportunity to correct figures or facts, although not many were incorrect (or mis-typed); some took the chance to press for additional recommendations (primarily for additional resources); and many commented that they appreciated having the

chance to read the document which concerned them and that they thought it fair, balanced, reasonable and accurate. Typically, faculty do not read the final draft until it has been sent to the Graduate School, and equally typically, they have no say in its final format or findings.

On the principle that people "own" the data which they furnish about themselves, each faculty member also had the right to withdraw specific comments which he or she made (which were used as illustrative of findings and interpretations). No faculty member withdrew any comment, but many complimented the review committee on its fairness in presenting such qualitiative data.

While the member check process stretched the time for review out for another 4-6 weeks, it seemed well worth the trouble to allow faculty members to review and reflect on what they valued their affiliation with this program area.

Problems with the Process

As Barak has also pointed out, the program review process itself may prove, over time and especially with shifting purposes, to be inadequate, and ought to be periodically evaluated for "fine tuning" (1986, p. 24). There were and still are four problems with the program review process at the University of Kansas. Each of those can alter, extend, or utterly sabotage the process. Since they are not simply institutional problems, but may extend to other institutions and other settings, each deserves a mention.

The first problem lies with the training of faculty to be interviewers. In the case presented here, all of the committee members had done interviewing (as a formal inquiry process)

previously, most of them in their own research work. But in other circumstances and with other faculty the skills needed for careful but unstructured interviewing and the maintenance of field notes might be foreign or threatening. Fortunately, most faculty have served in governance work (such as search and screen efforts) where interviewing is used. But the committee chairperson might have to make the link more to governance than to research and inquiry more generally, since many faculty would not have used interviewing necessarily in their own inquiry arena.

Second, there is occasionally (or perhaps often) a commitment problem. The necessity for the chairperson to take seriously the program review assignment, and to be persistent in convening the committee and liaisons is underrated. The committee will not convene itself. Unless the committee is headed by a person who takes the program review process seriously, and who is willing to devote personal or secretarial time to meeting the scheduling demands of busy faculty, the job will not be done, or it will be done indifferently. The program review commissioning body (in this case, the Dean of the Graduate School and his staff) must exercise great care in the choice of the chairperson, or some reviews will be done tardily if at all.

A third problem is also a quaint one. It has to do with departments who unilaterally decide they are "too busy" to enter into the program review process, or that they have too many problems at the moment to undergo review, that a concurrent accreditation is taking too much of their time, or the like. Several departments in this same university have in effect refused to

cooperate in the review process. In the face of their collective stubbornness, the process has broken down. What can be done about thatt problem is unclear. When an academic department refuses to admit the review committee and announces its intention to subvert the process, the response tends to be one of bafflement and confusion. The resolution of this recalcitrance awaits a more ingenious mind.

The fourth problem is that of coordinating the program review process on campus with the statewide coordinating agency's review process. In some instances, including the case presented here, the/campus program review process was scheduled either to precede or roughly coincide with the statewide review. Fortunately, the statewide review took this particular case study as illuminating, but the decreased reliance on technical and numerical data meant that the program area had to supply a second self-study, essentially. In the future, it might be wise to have the program review final draft include more technical data, which would then not have to be re-arrayed and represented to the statewide coordinating agency. Providing the same data again and again in different formats leads to the feeling of being "studied to death". It seems a shame to review programs which clearly ought to be continued and supported until they are drowned in the data-collection and review effort.

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